

The Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority is also involved with conservation. A portion of their lands have been leased to the County for the operation of Lake Crabtree County Park.

Thus, there are quite a large number of public and private entities involved with land protection and conservation in the county. However, many of these places are in “soft” protection, and with the ever-increasing population and the urge to build in the county, some lands could be sold for development unless stronger protection is enacted. Even where conservation lands are not sold, development (e.g., campgrounds, visitor centers, and residences) is expected on some sites, utility corridors and highways will likely continue to fragment sites, and timbering will alter other sites.

Priorities for Protection

Normally one determines priority of protection for sites in descending order of site significance, from National to State to Regional to County. However, the most significant unprotected sites from a National or State perspective are aquatic habitats, such as Little River, Middle Creek, and Swift Creek. Protection of aquatic sites by land acquisition or conservation easement is a very difficult if not impossible task, given the probable hundreds of owners whose property abuts these bodies of water. In addition, such land protection is one of only several necessary tools for protecting water quality. Land protection should be supplemented by legal action, such as enacting stricter discharge laws and stronger wording on, and enforcement of, sedimentation control and streamside buffers.

In terms of feasible protection, two sites – both of Regional significance – stand out. Yet each has considerable obstacles to overcome. Middle Creek Bluffs and Floodplain is probably the most likely candidate for protection, but its main obstacle is simply a large number of owners within the defined boundaries of this large site. It is hoped that at least a few key tracts can be protected, and once such key tracts are protected, perhaps other owners will follow with protection of their lands. The other site is critically endangered and might not be able to be “saved” – the Southwest Rolesville Granitic Outcrops. In summer 2002, survey crews had flagged, and were in the process of flagging, numerous tracts through the site. A recently constructed sewerline bisects the site, and the N.C. Department of Transportation is proposing the Rolesville By-pass for this southern and eastern side of Rolesville. Nonetheless, this is a remarkably large area of various granitic outcrops, and maybe one or two tracts can be acquired that protect some of the site.

Another important (Regional) unprotected site is Robertson’s Pond and Buffalo Creek Floodplain. For much of the past 20 years the NC NHP had “soft” protection of Robertson’s Pond through a Registry agreement with the former owner. The owner subsequently passed away, and the pond was recently acquired by another private citizen. Efforts should be made by NC NHP to re-register the site and by TLC or perhaps Wake County to enact conservation easements or other protection, if purchase of the pond is not an option. TLC does have a 24-acre conservation easement on a very small section of the Buffalo Creek floodplain. Hopefully, some